

***The Outsiders*: Prereading Context**

Meet the Author

Susan Eloise Hinton was born on July 22, 1948, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Hinton began writing *The Outsiders* at age fifteen while still in high school. The novel was inspired by the social divisions she observed between different groups of teenagers in her community. Publishers feared that readers would not take a female writer seriously, so Hinton published using only her initials: S. E. Over the years, *The Outsiders* has occasionally been challenged or banned in some schools because of its mature themes, which include gang violence and social conflict. However, the novel is also widely praised for its honest portrayal of teenage struggles and its messages about empathy and understanding others.

The 1960s: A Decade to Remember



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that civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated during a parade motorcade in Texas. The nation was left reeling.

After Kennedy's death, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson became president and led the country during a period of major change. For example, less than a year into office, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, legally ending segregation in public accommodations and banning employment discrimination.

Music also shaped youth culture in new ways during this time. The British band The Beatles became a worldwide superhit in the early 1960s. They completed their first U.S. tour in 1964, stopping in 24 cities around the country.

According to S. E. Hinton, *The Outsiders* takes place in 1965. The Vietnam War was in its tenth year. Despite major actions by the United States, including bombing campaigns in North Vietnam, the war continued to intensify. As more and more Americans died abroad, anti-war protests grew at home. On November 13, 1965, about 35,000 protestors marched on Washington, D.C.

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The year 1965 brought major political and cultural changes. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed, protecting citizens' rights to vote. At the same time, civil unrest occurred in Los Angeles. Riots, looting, and arson broke out during protests against police brutality and racial inequality.

There were noticeable changes in everyday life too. This was the first year that mandated health warnings appeared on cigarette packages; smoking was increasingly seen as unhealthy and less socially acceptable. Popular toys for kids included the bouncy Super Ball and the skateboard, which sold millions of units and became new crazes among young people.

Other aspects of society also changed. The miniskirt made its first appearance at the same time that men's hair was growing longer. Technology was leaping forward. The word "hypertext" was created to describe linking information within the earliest computer networks. The Gateway Arch in St. Louis was completed and



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Tragedy struck again in 1968. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. His death deeply shook the nation and the Civil Rights Movement, and it helped pressure the passage of the Fair Housing Act.

As the decade neared its end, 1969 brought two more historic cultural moments. The United States successfully landed astronauts on the moon during the Apollo 11 mission. That same year, the Woodstock music festival took place, bringing together hundreds of thousands of people to celebrate music and culture.

Marked by war, tragedy, creativity, discovery, and progress, the 1960s were a decade to remember—one that transformed culture, politics, and society as the country moved into the 1970s.

1. Identify three of the changes that occurred in everyday life in the 1960s.

Name: _____

Use with the book:
The Outsiders by S. E. Hinton

The Outsiders: Prereading Context

2. What were two major effects of the Civil Rights Act of 1964?

3. How did television influence the election of 1960?

4. Explain how each of these events shaped 1960s America.



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5. Explain how each of these events shaped 1960s America.

- a. _____
- b. _____

6. How might the many extreme societal changes of the 1960s have influenced teenagers such as S.E. Hinton?

7. What is one event you'd like to know more about? Why?

ANSWER KEY

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2. What were two major effects of the Civil Rights Act of 1964?

It ended segregation in public accommodations and banned employment discrimination.

3. How did television influence the election of 1960?

Debates were televised for the first time. Kennedy looked younger, more confident, and more polished than Nixon.

4. Explain how one of the events shaped 1960s America.

- the Voting Rights Act of 1965
- the Vietnam War
- the moon landing



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a. **John F. Kennedy, 1963, Texas**

b. **Martin Luther King Jr., 1968, Tennessee**

6. How might the major societal changes of the 1960s have influenced teenagers such as Ponyboy?

Answers will vary.

7. What is one event you'd like to know more about? Why?

Answers will vary.